

Research at the Operational Directorate Natural Environments (RBINS)

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The Operational **Directorate Natural Environment (OD Nature)** is the largest of the three scientific directorates of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS). Although recent in its creation, the directorate has a long history in marine research. About 70 people out of a total staff of about 100 are either directly or indirectly involved in this field. The mission of OD Nature is fourfold:

- The study of the biotic and abiotic components of the natural environment and the interactions of the systems that form part of it.
- Providing scientific expertise including running a monitoring program for the North Sea and capacity building in the field of biodiversity in developing countries.
- The management and improvement of databases and major scientific instruments such as the RV Belgica.
- Representing the Federal state in international bodies and instruments.

Spread over three locations in Brussels and Ostend, OD Nature scientists have an acknowledged expertise and strong reputation in their fields that include ecology, molecular biology, nature conservation and protection, biodiversity, chemistry, hydrodynamics, modelling, databases and image processing. The ultimate aim or vision of the OD is to become a 'Centre of excellence in fundamental and applied research of biodiversity and ecosystems in support of the protection and sustainable management of the natural environment'.

In this demo we will present the activities and research of OD Nature with a special emphasis on those related to the marine environment. There will be posters on the structure, research and activities of the OD and a movie on the need for a new research vessel replacing the venerable RV Belgica in the near future.